



A BITE OF BAROSSA

By Olivia Palamountain

Speak to any Australian and they'll tell you with fondness that Barossa people are "different". Take a seat in the Daimler belonging to John Baldwin, a local guide, and it's nigh on impossible not to fall in love. Not only is his car – a restored original used by the Queen on her 1963 tour of Australia – an absolute beauty, but Baldwin is also a glorious eccentric, like a characterful Aussie uncle you never realised you were missing.

With Baldwin at the helm of the Daimler (and me doing my best regal impression in the back), we are touring the Barossa Valley in style. This glorious stretch of South Australia lies around 30 miles north-east of Adelaide, and can lay claim to being both one of the country's premier wine regions and one of its most beautiful.

There's little that Baldwin doesn't know about this part of the world and, as we cruise through acres of rolling countryside precisely laid with vines, he fills me in. The first thing to appreciate about the Barossa Valley is its food and drink. As well as its wines – most famously its big, bold shiraz – the valley is renowned among gourmets for its regional produce, sold at pitstops such as Maggie Beer's Farm Shop (owned by Australia's answer to Delia Smith) and its restaurants, such as the renowned FermentAsian. The second thing to appreciate is that, although Baldwin is as passionate about booze as he is about driving, he doesn't mix the two. Thankfully.

A quick snoop in the tiny town of Angaston confirms there's much gastro-gold in these hills, from Casa Carboni, an Italian cooking school and enoteca, to the Barossa Valley Cheese Company and Schulz Butchers, founded in 1939 and renowned for its traditional curing and smoking methods. The Apex Bakery, up the road in Tanunda, is another delight: a family business since 1924, this bakery still churns out the same-recipe sourdoughs, pies and pasties from its Scotch oven as it did nearly 100 years ago.

These aren't the only historical success stories of the Barossa. The vine stocks are among the oldest on earth, brought over by German immigrants fleeing religious persecution some 170 years ago – thus saving them from disease that wiped out many European vines in the 19th century. With around 50 wineries in the region, it would be hard to know where to start without some expert guidance, but as it happens I do recognise the name of our first stop.

Yalumba is well known in the UK for its accessible plonk, but this pretty estate – at 166 years old, the oldest family-owned vineyard in the country – also

produces exquisite small-batch wines. At a tasting, I'm immediately sold on the Paradox, an inky 2010 shiraz of mixed spice and violets with blueberry hints.

Next up on our road trip is Hentley Farm, voted 2015's Winery of the Year by Australia's Halliday Wine Companion. Within restored stables dating from the 1880s, local lad and head chef Lachlan Colwill serves inspired, imaginative food ranging from a mango-yoghurt pudding, designed to look like a boiled egg and served in a real eggshell, to a signature dish of oysters and rosemary, the scent of which comes alive with the addition of dry ice. Baldwin wangles us a table, but not before I've tasted two of the star wines on offer, evocatively named "Beauty" and "The Beast". Ever the sucker for a bad boy, I pick up a bottle of The Beast.

Although within stumbling distance of Hentley Farm is Seppeltsfield Vineyard Cottage, a cute couples retreat perfect for a weekend of solitude, I head to The Louise, where each suite has a terrace, fireplace and outdoor rainshower. Designed by a Californian couple looking for a Napa vibe, it's the sort of glamorous place you might want to hunker down on honeymoon, before wandering to its destination dining spot, Appellation, which serves locally and seasonally driven dishes such as Port Lincoln bluefin tuna with air-dried ham and lemon marmalade, and pan-fried Gawler River quail with bitter leaves and roasted hazelnut dressing.

There's no time for me to hang about, though. Next morning Baldwin is ready to whisk me off to try something extra special at Seppeltsfield. This cellar houses the Centennial Collection, the world's oldest and only range of consecutive Vintage Tawny since 1878. I try both a slug from a barrel from 1985 (the year I was born) and a nip of the 1885, watching with awe as a phial of liquid gold is extracted, and presented to me with reverence. It tastes ambrosial.

Later on there is less theatre to be found at the smaller, modern vineyards, such as Torbreck Wines (tipped by Baldwin as the next big thing), but the produce – and producers – are no less impressive. Indeed, the Barossa folk I've come across really are a different breed: passionate, warm and more than a little quirky. There's definitely magic in the vines.

John Baldwin's Daimler tours (0061 8 8524 9047; barossadaimlertours.com.au) cost from £225 for a half-day. Austravel (0808 163 6126; austravel.com) offers a nine-day Adelaide food trip from £1,789, including car hire, eight nights' accommodation, and return Etihad Airways flights (etihad.com).





VINE, ALL VINE
*John Baldwin with one of his
two renovated 1962 Daimlers
in Barossa and outside
Château Tanunda (top left)*
Photograph CINDY FAN